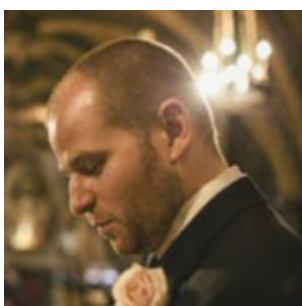


For Mass Atrocity Prevention to be effective the UK must look beyond 'like-minded' partners



*The UK's recently published mass atrocity prevention strategy includes a commitment to work alongside 'like-minded' partners. Drawing on the tradition of ethical pragmatism, **Adrian Gallagher** argues that to deliver protection to the victims of mass atrocities, the UK and its partners must look beyond 'like-minded' states to achieve its goals in a post-liberal multiplex world.*

On October 17 2022, the UK House of Commons International Development Committee released its long awaited cross-party report entitled '[From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world](#)'. The title reflects the Committee's commitment to learning lessons from the past to shape UK Mass Atrocity Prevention going forward. The central recommendation is the call to establish a new cross-departmental strategy on mass atrocity prevention to fulfil seven goals:

- i) incorporate 'prevention into all stages of the policy cycle',
- ii) clarify training needs and work to fulfil these,
- iii) demonstrate how the UK can work with 'like-minded international partners, particularly the United States,
- iv) be inclusive in its approach,
- v) embed mass atrocity prevention across the UK Government including 'trade, supply chains, education, asylum and border policy',

- vi) address the challenge posed by new threats such as new technology and finally,
- vii) work to 'secure justice' for victims of mass atrocities around the world.

The report thus has an *internal* and *external* dimension. The internal dimension relates to its call for a governmental strategy that fulfils these seven goals (alongside more cited throughout the report). The external dimension refers to who should carry forth this strategy at the international level. Notably, the report sees the UK as a potential pioneer that should work with 'like-minded' states, in particular the US, which published its own [mass atrocity prevention strategy](#) in July which also embodies a call to work with '[like-minded](#)' partners. It is this external dimension that presents challenges, particularly as the power and influence of the US and the UK is weakening in what some have called a [post-liberal](#) or [multiplex](#) world order. There is therefore an underlying implication that in an era of shifting power balances, the UK may need to be both able and willing to work with non-liberal and anti-liberal states to advance mass atrocity prevention.

Like-minded?

On October 6 2022, the United Nations Human Rights Council held a vote on the situation in Xinjiang. The initial vote of 17 'Yes' votes, 11 'abstentions', and 19 'No' votes, saw the call for a debate rejected. Whilst many states, leading experts, and international human rights organisations have labelled this genocide and/or crimes against humanity, a majority of states on the Council voted against 'simply' holding a debate. Whatever the driver, there appears to be as many 'like-minded' states against mass atrocity prevention as for it, at least, on this issue, in the UN Human Rights Council. The outcome led politicians, such as, [Lord Alton](#), to call for the debate to be moved to the United Nations General Assembly in the hope that a broader consensus could be forged. This is understandable, yet, at the same time it is important not to gloss over how many states have not bought into the narrative that the UK took a lead in creating since 2019 (when it worked with other 'like-minded' countries to condemn China), and have in contrast created a counter-narrative with many states showing support for China.

Broadening the debate could well deepen the consensus against mass atrocity crimes. On October 12, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly voted to condemn

Russia's annexation of the Ukraine. The Resolution was supported by 143 states with 35 abstentions and just 4 voting against. The outcome led [Charlie Carpenter](#) to argue that rather than see this as another empty gesture, we should recognise the UN Charter is constraining the behaviour of Putin. However, the problem at least from a mass atrocity prevention perspective for cases other than Ukraine, is that the crisis has been framed in terms of a military invasion that violates the fundamentals of the UN Charter, rather than mass atrocity prevention. Where governments perpetrate mass atrocities in their own borders, there is a reluctance to protect, with the cases of China and Myanmar being textbook examples. As such, it is not clear if working with 'like-minded' states will be enough to further mass atrocity prevention in the manner victims need.

An Ethically Pragmatic Way Forward

Contemporary research on the [pragmatic ethics](#) surrounding mass atrocity prevention seeks to foster a normative conversation that draws insight from different, and even opposing, schools of thought in [International Relations](#). Rather than proceed on the assumption that there are fixed goals at stake, such as democracy promotion or the promotion of neo-liberal economics, ethical pragmatists seek to address the problem at hand by making judgments about probable results. To highlight the problem of 'fixed goals' let us consider three examples. First, following the military takeover of Myanmar liberals called for the establishment of democracy as part of a mass atrocity prevention strategy, rather than considering that calling for the former may hinder the latter. Second, as Jason Ralph [explains](#), during the crisis in Syria, liberal calls for "Assad to go" may have been counterproductive, because it closed down space for political negotiation. Third, if practices such as naming and shaming a country over its human rights violations could lead to an increase in mass atrocities, then we need to reassess our [underlying assumptions](#).

What the victims of mass atrocity crimes need is protection. This requires difficult decisions being made within an ever-changing international landscape. Yes, the UK government can take a key role in mass atrocity prevention at the global level, but it should be grounded upon a commitment to pragmatic ethics and a willingness to find flexible solutions to the global challenge that is mass atrocity prevention. To do this the UK government will need to work with what [Acharya](#) describes as 'lesser powers, regional powers, international and transnational organizations and corporations' within a

'multiplex' world order. Many of these will not be 'like-minded'.

In the aftermath of the military intervention in Libya, Jason Ralph and I argued that 'liberal hegemony, which has never been powerful enough to end mass atrocity, is now even less [effective](#)'. Over a decade on from the disastrous intervention in Libya, this holds true. As a result, the UK will need to be both able and willing to work with non-liberal and anti-liberal states and organisations to further mass atrocity prevention in the future



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